GROWING PAINS: FACULTY CHALLENGES AND TRIUMPHS IN MOVING A COMMUNICATION PROGRAM ONLINE

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ABSTRACT

This case study of one communication department, which moved into offering their undergraduate program online, illustrates the innovative methods that the faculty employed in order to meet student demand for their courses. The faculty faced challenges related to meeting the needs of both their online and face-to-face students, to being asked to teach in formats where both sets of students were served, to building in opportunities for faculty-student and student-student connections in those environments, and to exploring how to make transformational learning opportunities available to all of their students. The implications of this study are discussed for making such a change sustainable in departments.

Keywords: online programs, communication online classes, departmental change, online curriculum

INTRODUCTION

> *My experience teaching online has been probably the hardest growing experience I've had to do as an educator. It's been frustrating and challenging and exhausting. ... I love that our online program allows students who couldn't otherwise get a degree get one. That is why I do it. ... I would do it again, and I will keep doing it. (Faculty member)*

In 1998, our communication department started offering a few online undergraduate courses, but we never anticipated that by 2015 we would be offering a completely online undergraduate communication degree program, in addition to the on-campus undergraduate program. In the process of moving this direction, the faculty faced specific challenges as they embraced innovative ways to create transformational learning opportunities for both face-to-face and online students.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To set the stage for this case study, we need to understand the larger educational context in which online education plays a role. Bejereno (2008) explained how distance education—the offering of courses synchronously for students at remote locations—was the precursor to online education. The technology used in those courses became more available and led to the piloting of asynchronous online courses, which took off in popularity and now there are many resources dedicated to improving online instruction (e.g., Major, 2015). Some instructors and institutions have experimented with a hybrid approach to teaching, in which typically at least 50% of the "seat time" for the class is spent in person (Paull & Snart, 2016; Snart, 2010). There is much variation across disciplines in how hybrid courses are taught and in the amount of in-person instruction that happens, with some courses allowing students to move in and out of the face-to-face classroom at their choice in a more flexible, or HiFlex, environment (Educause, 2010; Paull & Snart, 2016).

Over the years, Allen and Seaman (2016, 2017) have found a steep increase in the number of college students choosing to take at least one online course as part of their college education, especially at public

institutions. In Fall 2002, only 9.6% of students in the United States were taking at least one online course. By 2012, the number had grown to 25.9%, and by 2015, this number had jumped to 29.7% of all college students enrolled in the United States (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Taking these types of courses allows nontraditional students to work full time and take care of their family responsibilities and allows traditional students to work at the times when classes are offered in person. From an institutional perspective, the need for online education arose because of declining traditional college enrollments and a recognition that there were other populations of students who could benefit from completing their college education online (National Adult Learner Coalition, 2017; Schwartzman, 2007).

Most of the research that has been done on online curricula and programs has focused on developing curriculum for teaching a course online (Carr, 2014), strategies for teaching online courses (Easton, 2003; Wagner, Enders, Pirie, & Thomas, 2016), and student experiences in online courses (Byrd, 2016; Irani, Barbour Wilson, Slough, & Rieger, 2014; Ross, Gallagher, & Macleod, 2013). This, along with the growing area of research on the experience of social presence in online classes (e.g., Cui, Lockee, & Meng, 2012; Dixson, Greenwell, Rogers-Stacy, Weister, & Lauer, 2016; Krejins, Acker, Vermeulen, & Buuren, 2014; Weidlich & Bastiaens, 2017), has created a good picture of what is happening in online classes in terms of student experiences.

Because of the nature of the interactions that typically take place in communication classes, the speech communication field did not enter into the online education market as quickly as other disciplines, yet there was early recognition of how online techniques could be used within the face-to-face communication classroom (Aitken & Shedletsky, 2002; Beall, 2003; Shedletsky & Aitken, 2001). Scholars also talked about the benefits of teaching public speaking courses face-to-face rather than online (Clark & Jones, 2001). However, Morreale, Worley, and Hugenberg (2010), in their continued work assessing the basic freshman-level communication course, recognized there had been some institutions that had started offering the communication basic course online.

More recently, there have been researchers in the communication field looking at the instruction that takes place in online communication classrooms (e.g., Morreale, Valenzano, & Bauer, 2016; Strawser, Buckman, & Kaufmann, 2015), but there has not been research done on communication online degree programs except in technical communication areas, such as writing and business communication (cf. Santos, 2017). Although there is evidence that online communication degree programs exist (AC Online, n.d.), there is no study that specifically explores the challenges that faculty in these programs face when moving to offering online communication courses in these programs. It is also not clear what the effect of teaching online is on the instructor, when the program that the instructor is a part of is moving its whole major online and they are asked to take their traditional face-to-face courses and make them online courses. This case study of one program explores the experiences of instructors who make their face-to-face courses online courses by addressing two overall research questions.

RQ1: What were the challenges faced by communication faculty when moving their courses and program into the online teaching environment?

RQ2: What strategies did communication faculty use to face those challenges?

Studying this case can help give other programs insight into how to embrace the challenges that come with moving a program and its courses online.

METHODS

For this project, the authors used a case study method and chose a single case methodology (Yin, 2014), since they wanted to investigate the challenges faced in a particular case. Case study research is used to investigate a specific phenomenon within a real-life context, and typically it uses multiple forms of evidence in the study (Yin, 2014). Using a case study method allowed for a more in-depth approach to the research questions in order to develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of what happened in a particular department when moving their program and courses online.

Case Context

The case used for this study is a communication department at a Southern metropolitan university in existence since the 1970s. The department is focused on interpersonal and organizational communication, without mass communication, public relations, or journalism being a part of it. The department started offering online courses in

both 8- and 16-week formats in 1998. By 2015, the department offered enough courses online to start a fully online undergraduate major, in conjunction with a universitywide initiative for online education. The department continued offering an on-campus undergraduate major as well, but since five of their elective courses are offered only online (approximately 25% of total undergraduate courses offered), some face-to-face students choose to take online classes in order to complete their degree.

At the time the department started offering their undergraduate program online in 2015, they had an average of 40 undergraduate students, made up primarily of transfer and nontraditional students who were working more than 20 hours a week. Within one year of starting their program, the department's number of majors doubled. Along with adding brand new majors, about one-third of the face-to-face students switched over to being completely online students because there was a tuition discount for being an online only student at the university.

The department currently has a little over 100 students enrolled in the undergraduate program and 20 in the master's program. There are six full-time, tenure-track faculty members and three instructors in the department. Of those nine faculty members, all but one of them have taught completely online classes. The first author serves as one of the faculty members, and the second author is an alumnus of the department.

The department's basic communication course did not experience this enrollment change when the department's major started being offered online, since the majority of students who take that course are from other departments on campus. However, for the undergraduate major courses in the department, the department went from having face-to-face classes with healthy enrollments to those sections having fewer than ten students enrolling in them, making them not viable to offer, based on minimum enrollment standards of the university. This study looks at that transition from the perspective of the faculty and how they dealt with the challenges of teaching both online and face-to-face students.

Participants

For this study, six of the nine full-time faculty in the department (four females and two males) were interviewed by the second author. One of the faculty interviewed was the first author. Five of those interviewed were tenured faculty and one was an instructor. The ages of the faculty ranged from 30 to 70, with time teaching ranging from 5 years to over 50 years. Courses that the faculty members taught online included the basic speech course, communication theory and research classes, interpersonal and organizational communication courses, small group and nonverbal communication courses, intercultural communication courses, and the senior capstone course.

DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS

In order to provide the data for the case study from an instructor's perspective, the authors sought to understand the transition each faculty member had in teaching online. To do this, the second author asked each faculty member seven questions, specifically about their experience in teaching online classes, the challenges they have faced since beginning to teach online, the rewards from teaching online, how they go about preparing an online class, how they develop community when teaching online, their experiences in learning transformation within the online environment, and their perspective on teaching online.

In addition to the interview data, the faculty who were teaching both online and face-to-face students in the same section (as described in the findings below) met several times to brainstorm ways to face the challenges they were experiencing in teaching these courses. During these discussions, the first author took notes about the ideas presented during the brainstorming and then asked the faculty members involved to add additional ideas to the list created. These brainstorming notes also became a part of the data analyzed.

The interviews were transcribed by the authors, and the transcriptions and brainstorming notes were analyzed using thematic analysis. To determine themes that emerged from the data, the authors read over the interview transcripts independently, looking for specific challenges the faculty members faced and specific strategies they used to face those challenges. The authors then compared the strategies found in the interview transcripts with the brainstorming notes from the two faculty meetings observed and added them to the categories as appropriate.

They made a list of all the challenges and strategies identified, compared their lists, and then

grouped them into categories, as seen below.

Changing enrollments — Meeting needs of both sets of students

- Combining online and face-to-face sections
- Work load
- Section sizes

Building relationships

- Putting names with faces—face-to-face or Google Hangouts meetings
- Keeping students from getting lost—meetings, reminders, video announcements, course organization
- Helping students connect to each other—introduction videos, discussion groups, after hours meetings, required teamwork, on-campus opportunities
- Work-life balance—recognizing that we are making a difference

Meeting learning goals

- Student expectations of courses—preclass emails, required video chats or meetings, repetition, clear organization
- Getting students to apply concepts—essays, public speaking, group projects, research, teaching others, service learning
- Getting students to reflect on their learning—revisions, grade arguments

FINDINGS

The two research questions for this study explored the challenges faculty members faced when moving the program and their courses online and the strategies they undertook to face those challenges. From the interviews and notes, the authors found three primary challenges faculty members had to address: (a) changing enrollment needs requiring serving both online and face-to-face students, (b) building personal connections with and between students, and (c) creating transformative learning experiences for all students served to meet individual course and program learning goals. The first challenge was a program-based challenge, and the second and third challenges were primarily course-based challenges. This section is organized around these challenges and the strategies faculty used for each challenge.

Program Challenge: Meeting the Needs of Both Online and Face-to-Face Students

The growth of the number of online students coming into the program once the online program option was started in 2015, and the corresponding reduction in face-to-face student demand for the courses in the major, created a challenge for the department. Faculty were faced with face-to-face sections of their major courses not having enough students to be viable and only online classes being offered. Yet the department was still having students who wanted to take face-to-face classes, so the faculty needed to find an innovative, and hopefully sustainable, solution that would meet the needs of both sets of students. This became the primary program-based challenge faced by faculty when moving their program and courses online.

To deal with this challenge, faculty members agreed to experiment with limiting the number of students in the face-to-face and online sections and teaching them both as "one" section to try and meet the needs of the face-to-face students as well as the online students. Combining the online and face-to-face students into one course learning management system (LMS) shell could potentially allow the online and face-to-face students to interact with each other, thus building community between the two types of students in the major. The department chair was able to justify to administrators having the low-enrolled face-to-face sections make if the department counted its workload for a faculty member as one total section and combined the smaller, face-to-face and moderately enrolled online sections for a maximum of 30 students in the combined section. Therefore, faculty experimented with a variety of ways of teaching their online and face-to-face students, including fully online, flexible hybrid (Educause, 2010), and "mash-up" classes (fully face-to-face and online classes "mashed" together in one LMS). The last two are covered below, since they most clearly illustrate the innovative ways that faculty have worked to deal with the changing enrollment program challenge.

Flexible hybrid sections. When moving the program online, some instructors chose to offer their face-to-face classes once a week, in a hybrid format, in order to encourage more online and face-to-face students to attend as there was only one class a week to attend. Those hybrid sections were often combined into one LMS shell with an

online section of students, since there were still not typically enough students enrolled to have a hybrid section make by itself. This created a unique situation not typically faced by faculty teaching hybrid classes. Some instructors chose to provide separate course schedules for the face-to-face and online students within the same LMS shell to help students distinguish between the schedule differences. Other faculty members chose initially to have the face-to-face and online students in different LMS shells, which made it seem like they were teaching two separate classes. These faculty members have now moved to combining their online and face-to-face students into one LMS shell to make the workload more manageable.

Faculty who teach in this format often videotape their class lectures in the face-to-face class and upload them for the online students in the LMS. Once this is done for a particular semester, some faculty choose to use videos from a previous semester for both sets of students and make the videos only available within the LMS and do project-based workshops and activities during the face-to-face class period. They then post discussion and workshop guides for the online students within the LMS.

Amy (pseudonyms used throughout) talked about how doing this, with small numbers of hybrid students, allows her to have a "seminar feel" to her sophomore-level class, in which she gives her face-to-face students (and any online students who choose to come) specialized attention on their research projects and answers their questions in person in class. "This allows me to use my out-of-class appointment time primarily for my students who can't attend the class."

Adam, who now teaches all of his undergraduate classes during the regular semester in a flexible hybrid format, said the hybrid experience is the "best experience," since "the students are happy because they don't have to come three times a week, but they still get to see their professor and get the interaction." He also noted that "those interactions and lectures can then be uploaded for the whole class." He believes that teaching this way allows him to spend more individual time with students outside of class. He regularly invites online students to come to campus, and if they cannot come, he talks to them by phone. "Then when they meet us, they are more connected to us. They form a bond, and we get to know them a little bit more and what they want to do."

Mash-up sections. To meet the needs of both face-to-face and online students, where there are not enough face-to-face students typically to allow that type of section to make, one instructor chose to offer a traditional face-to-face class that is combined with a completely online class within one LMS shell, as a sort of "mash-up" class. Although this instructor had already taught the classes separately in a face-to-face environment and completely online, when moving to this "mash-up" class, she chose to design the course for a completely online environment first. She chose to use the face-to-face sessions for brief content lectures (which were recorded and posted the same day for all students) and application/workshop sessions. Kim, who now teaches all of her classes in this format, said, "I love the structure and explicitness of designing fully online curriculum—it helps to keep me organized, transparent, and provides all sorts of resources (available 24/7) for ALL students."

In the mash-up sections, the course calendar has labels for "face-to-face only" and "online only" to help distinguish between work related to each format. If there is no label, all students complete the work the same way. All students submit their work within the LMS, making it easier for the instructor to keep track of assignments regardless of the student type. Online students are invited to attend the face-to-face classes when they can, and several students periodically take advantage of this during the semester. Students are required to provide feedback to at least one face-to-face student and one online only student in discussion boards to encourage student interaction between types of students. Kim explained that she works to make the interface seamless between the two groups of students:

> *Because I'm trying very hard to make my face-to-face and online experiences as seamless as possible, I use the same basic pedagogical principles of Kolb's [2015] learning theory for both. I'm always thinking about what the experiences are that I'm creating. I'm creating experiences in class, but what am I designing online that would be comparable, not the same, but at least comparable for application activities.*

Previously Kim taught online students and face-to-face students in two separate sections. Now that these students are in one section together, she said that it is difficult to "account for true workload." She further stated, "While the experience has been incredibly positive (from an instructor perspective) and beneficial, in terms of reducing isolation for our online students, the increased class size is a bit daunting."

Faculty members being willing to teach in ways that allow online and face-to-face students to interact with each other has been an experiment for the department faculty, but it seems to be working to meet the needs of both sets of students, if faculty members are willing to experiment with putting their course sections together into one larger LMS shell. Faculty members who are not willing to do this choose to offer their courses completely online so face-to-face students have to take those courses online if they want to take them. That, however, is the exception, with only five elective undergraduate courses in the department offered completely online.

Community Challenges: Building Connections

A second challenge that faculty faced when moving the major to being offered online was to re-create the relationships they built with their students and the peer interactions that would happen in face-to-face communication classes. Faculty members who originally chose to teach online tended to be those who liked to experiment with different teaching methods and fully embraced the opportunity to develop similar kinds of relationships with students and between students as they had in the face-to-face classrooms.

The first instructor to venture into this was Cathy, who taught primarily interpersonal classes and based her pedagogy on Buber's (1970) work to humanize relationships. Cathy said, "My job is to make the most authentic and real experience online for students that I possibly can." She went on to say, "I want to humanize the course, so I read and comment on what the students say and make my comments back to each of them personal."

Faculty-student connections. Since Cathy teaches completely online classes, she noted that one of the challenges she faces is building the faculty-student relationships in more traditional ways.

> *I like to know the students' names. ... But since I only know their names, when they come up to me in the hallway and say "hello," I don't know them until they say their names, so I like it when students come by and introduce themselves to me in person.*

Similarly, Adam said, "Teaching online you still don't get to know them." He told a story of a student dropping by and how, since she was an online student, he didn't recognize her. "The face-to-face missing makes knowing the students difficult."

Taking the time to learn how to build these relationships in an online teaching environment often happens after the curriculum for the course has already been developed. Most of the faculty members interviewed had created their courses in the face-to-face genre first, before beginning to teach the course online, and then they transferred it online. The more they teach a course and get comfortable with it, the more they are able to focus on building community in these classes. Kim stated:

> *At least with Advanced Public Speaking, I'm to the point now that the curriculum is where it needs to be even though I tweak it every now and then. But I don't have to worry about that part now. Now I can really focus on the relationship part when I get the new batch of students.*

Even when we are aware, as professors, of the importance of building opportunities for relationships with students, it is easy for students to get lost in the online environment and just quit "showing up" to do their work. This has been something that many of the faculty have faced with the online student population. George explained:

> *Online, there is a major disconnect with students ... Add to that, that online classes can get off students' radar screens. I send out emails the first week of class to let them know what to expect. This isn't a "take a test, write a paper, disappear sort of class."*

When teaching online, it is often hard for instructors to gauge what students really need. Kim explained:

> *My experience teaching online has been the hardest growing I've had to do as an*

educator... . There have been moments of feeling rewarded but the payoff isn't the same as a face-to-face class... . It's been hard to figure out how to best help my students. Intuitively I can figure that out in the face-to-face environment better.

Karen, agreed, stating, "Students in face-to-face classes are able to ask more questions than students online because I'm with them in class. I don't have to worry as much about them understanding."

To help keep online students engaged and to get to know students better, faculty talked about building in opportunities for students to come and meet them. For example, George requires online students in his classes to have two face-to-face or skype-like meetings with him during the semester. Amy and Kim both require a midterm meeting with students. Even with these meetings, though, not all students take advantage of them, or they simply rely on phone calls for these meetings, which is not the same as getting to know the students in a face-to-face environment over the whole semester. Karen explained:

I send them reminders and ask them to reach out to me, but it's difficult for them to trust me... . I try to help them understand that this is my job, and this is what I do, and I'm just as available to you as I am to my face-to-face students. I'm a real person on the other side of the screen.

The energy it takes to build these types of relationships with online students means that faculty have to be aware of the demand on work-life boundaries this type of teaching has on them, even though it is rewarding. Kim noted:

To have those moments of students saying, "you know you're the first online Professor I've ever talked to. I've actually heard your voice and talked to you in real time. Not just got an email from you." That is weirdly rewarding... . It makes having to be in my kitchen at 8:30 at night talking to students rewarding. Because I don't necessarily want to be doing those things... It is much easier to come face-to-face, do my work, and be in my office. But the boundaries are very blurred for online students. And they need to be, because of the nature of when they're able to talk with me. And that is something I've been working hard not to be resentful about. I struggle with needing to meet their needs, because it's infringing on my family.

Cathy also talked about the time that it takes to make the online environment more human, noting that she works harder in online classes to respond to students' work in personal ways, so they know there is someone real beyond the screen. She noted that one of the reasons why she takes the time to respond personally to each of the students' reflections is because of what they share. "They take it as a forum to work through difficult situations. Since some of it is private, they may not have opened up to anyone else, but they can to me because I'm distant." Even though it is hard, the faculty interviewed all said it was worth it. Kim explained:

I love that our online program allows students who couldn't otherwise get a degree get one. That is why I do it... I care about what they learn. And what they learn about themselves and their abilities to make their lives better.

Peer connections. Along with building relationships with their online students, faculty recognize that building relationships is not just about the students making connections to them. Online students often miss out on making important connections with their peers. Kim described that her views on the importance of this have changed over time:

The other challenge that I didn't even really think about at all when I first started teaching online was about community building... . "That can't be important to the students or they wouldn't be taking classes online," is kind of what I was thinking. As long as they are connected to me, that's what matters. I have since changed that. They need to be connected to me, but they also need to be connected to each other, because they are so isolated.

To confront these issues of building relationships within the class, faculty members talked about offering opportunities for students to meet with them and with each other. For example, they may require students to introduce themselves to the class at the beginning of the semester with a class

video. They set up group discussion groups within the LMS. They offer the option of meeting after hours in groups with Google Hangouts, which has helped increase the connections among students. They pair up face-to-face and online students for peer review or group projects in an attempt to build relationships between the two groups of students. Faculty also provide opportunities for students to come to campus to present their speeches, as Karen noted:

> *I allow them to speak on campus, and most of them take the opportunity. Some of them come both nights of speeches, because they want to meet the students in the class. I think that speaks to their connection, because they are taking time out of their schedule to come watch their classmates speak.*

Overall, faculty in this department are aware of the need for community-building for their students and are working to build in opportunities for the students to get to know them and the other students in the classes. The use of flexible hybrid and mash-up classes allow students from both the online and face-to-face cohorts to get to know each other and build a larger sense of community among the undergraduate population of the department.

Learning Challenges: Creating Transformative Learning Opportunities

This department's communication classes are typically known for the active and applied learning that is done in them (McIntyre & Fuller, 2016). Faculty often choose activities and projects that involve role-playing, practice, and reflection, when designing their course content surrounding topics such as perception-checking, listening, self-disclosure, creating messages that are adapted to your audience, conflict management, and public speaking. They intentionally build in opportunities for peer feedback on classes and teach students how to give ethical feedback to each other in the process of peer review. Creating this learning environment in an online program has been a challenge for the department faculty.

Many of the teachers in the department have won outstanding teaching awards over the years because of how they have embraced instructional communication practices that were influential in changing students' lives. These same instructors have consistently looked for ways to make their courses more interactive over time. So, when faced with translating these transformative practices to the online environment, they felt challenged. Cathy noted, for example, "Discussions, exercises, interactions happen face-to-face. Online you have to think about what you do. You have to think about what you are creating."

The following section is organized around lessons the faculty learned to best meet the learning needs of these students as they moved their teaching online. Along with earlier strategies presented on how faculty face the challenges they encountered when moving to teaching in an online program, these lessons help answer the second research question regarding innovative online teaching.

Make expectations clear. Faculty members recognized the importance of making your expectations about learning clear, especially since they were working to make the online classes more interactive. For example, Kim sends out a preclass email that contains a "survival guide" for her classes in which she lists out clear expectations for the class. She does this because of "the challenge of navigating student expectations about what it means to take your classes online," stating, "I try to at least elude to it in the email before the class starts—'this class is not done in isolation. A lot of the class is commenting on your peers' work and getting feedback from them.'" She uses a required video chat for online students to help let them know more about her expectations:

> *I have one required conference that they have to have with me. It has to be a face-to-face video chat where they are just able to talk to me. That has done a lot to help them understand why I do what I do and why the course is what it is and the way it is*

Kim also talked about the importance of repetition for students to understand what is happening in the class:

> *So it's better to send an email AND do an announcement AND do a video. It's better to have too much of that out there… They need it in multiple places. Because they're not getting that immediacy that is face-to-face.*

Making expectations clear relates also to letting students know a faculty member's philosophy of learning. For example, many of the faculty require

revisions to assignments, which students may not be used to doing because they approach classes with a desire to merely complete them. George says he talks to them about "the structure that is built into revision. I stress to them that. One of the things I focus on is phrases that demonstrate a mindset that is worth challenging," in order to help them get to the place where their mind shifts to "'I want to learn,' rather than just get through this class." Kim said she likes to see the shift in "their thoughts about what an education is … it's not just about getting your grade. It's about learning."

In short, the need for this clarity in expectations comes down to the needs of the online learners themselves. Faculty members recognized the need to understand how online students were approaching learning to best prepare the students for the online environment.

Keep it organized. In the process of making their expectations clear, faculty have learned the importance of organizing everything when teaching online, since online students need very clear structure. For example, Kim stated:

> *I think the physical layout of the learning management system shell is important so it needs to be very clear, very structured. The very first time I taught online, my instructional designer found 'rabbit hole' clicks, like you have to click five times to get this to work. So while it was very clean, it was a nightmare trying to tell students how to find stuff.*

In the process of organizing their classes, faculty members recognize that there is not the opportunity to make changes easily as if you are preparing a whole course at once to be open for students to see online. Cathy explained:

> *I am used to giving myself a little leeway, because if I come up with a brilliant exercise in class, I can come in and change a plan and do it, but I can't do that in online… . I had to reorient the way I think about a class and do it in advance. But I think it's probably better—I've learned about the value of that intent and precise planning throughout.*

It is clear that this planning and organization is very important to faculty members so they can make sure they are accomplishing the learning goals of the class for online students.

Choose transformative activities for the online environment. To facilitate learning, many of the faculty talked about intentionally choosing activities that helped students apply and reflect on what they were learning in class, which is consistent with Kolb's (2015) experiential learning model. Cathy stated:

> *In every class, I try to design an experience or experiences in which students will have to actually go out and practice the communication we are talking about… . So I design exercises where they'll practice their skills and then write about it.*

She further explained, "The more you can get the person to talk about the concepts, the more they learn from the concepts," so she intentionally builds in opportunities for students to talk about the concepts with their classmates and people outside of the class. She also believes in giving them activities and real-life experiences that they come back and reflect on in the online environment. "When they reflect upon these experiences, they learn from it." Some examples of the activities that she and other faculty identified:

- Writing personal essays that include a place to journal and allow for both disclosure and reflection;
- Creating public speaking spaces outside of the classroom with real audiences;
- Designing group projects with clear contracts set up by the group for group behavior expectations;
- Teaching concepts to others both within and outside of the class;
- Surveying others about class topics and making sense of the data for the class;
- Employing service learning as a foundation for their presentations; and
- Participating in difficult dialogues outside of class.

What is common in these activities are the processes of application. Cathy explained that we have to "get them out into the world to apply some of this," in order for transformative learning to take place within the online environment. George noted, "The process in every class moves from theory to

the so what—what are you going to do with the information." He went on to say, "Showing students where the information is taking them—theory to concept to application—gives a lot of opportunities to reflect."

Build in opportunities for reflection. For faculty members who teach in the department, reflection is also a key part of that transformation. Kim has students make a grade argument at the end of the semester in which they have to reflect on their learning. She explained, "The thing that has become rewarding now is students, the online students particularly, … are able to reflect … and say I didn't think I could do this, but I can." Adam believes that reflection is necessary in order to have behavior change. He explained:

> *Unless your beliefs are shaken to the core, you don't have transformation. Asking students to reflect on who they are in relationship to the class becomes an important part of that transformation. Once they understand who they are, lots of things can happen.*

Once faculty saw transformation was possible in an online teaching environment, they recognized the importance of acknowledging the transformation that is happening. Cathy stated, "In a sense, there is a transformation in every class we teach… . It will be a different way of looking at the world." In order to see some of the transformation, she asks students at the end of the semester, "What concepts and ideas helped you see the world a little differently?"

In the department's classes, faculty recognize that students grow to realize that they can live out the departmental mission "to foster the co-creation of better social worlds through positive communication," which can be transformative for students in the department. Kim noted:

> *Students say, "I never realized until this class that I have important things to say and that people will listen to me." I think that's pretty transformative for a lot of our students, because up until that point, they didn't care or they didn't think that they were important enough to go and change things. So a lot of students talk about how they are confident now that if something was happening in their communities that they would go to a board meeting and they would talk… . They would be nervous about it, but they would know that they could do it. And that it is their responsibility to do it.*

This kind of learning, though, often does not come without emotional angst for the student, as Kim explained:

> *The ones that had no idea that they were capable of this kind of work, those are the ones that I love. Because they didn't want to do it and they fought and they bitched and they cried and they tore their hair and they cursed me. But then when they stopped fighting and just started trying, and realize that they have never worked this hard ever but that they could and saw what they did and it was amazing... . They realize that they are a person that fights, and the ones that choose to fight are the ones that have the biggest transformation… . That's when they have the most pride. And I think that's the biggest transformation.*

Faculty see evidence of transformation happening as they apply their pedagogical practices in the online environment, as they have for years in the face-to-face environment, which Kim notes makes teaching online worth it:

> *I care about what they learn about themselves and their abilities to make their lives better… . If they can communicate with their family better, that is huge, and that is what we get to do in our department. So to have more students have access to that is always a good thing. Even if my course is not doing what I wanted to be doing, it's still better than them not being in a class… . It's worth it. Because we can have students learning those things. And we work really hard in our department to give them a valuable learning experience.*

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how instructors face challenges that arise as a result of moving a program and its courses online. The communication department, on which this case study is based, doubled the number of

undergraduate majors within two years of offering its program online due to the university's emphasis on online education. This growth was applauded by administrators from the outside, who did not realize the adaptations the faculty were having to make without any new hires being made to help cover the classes. When administrators were told about the experiment happening with flexible hybrid and mash-up classes, they were concerned, because they could not see how this would figure into the workload of the faculty members. To be honest, some of the faculty members resisted as well, for similar reasons, believing initially that they were being asked to teach "two classes for the price of one."

Faculty members who voluntarily participated in teaching in this format met multiple times with each other to talk about the learning curve they were facing in their teaching. They talked about the disadvantages and advantages of teaching this way and shared suggestions on how to make it work. Their experiences serve as an example for other departments who might face similar kinds of challenges in bringing their programs and courses online.

Recommendations & Implications

In their interviews, the faculty members who taught in this format focused on the pedagogy of teaching rather than the limitations and advantages the technology might provide. They realized the importance of designing the course curriculum for a completely online environment and maximizing the use of face-to-face sessions for brief, recorded-content lectures and application and workshop-based sessions, similar to what Carr (2014), Paull and Snart (2016) and Wagner et al. (2016) recommend. In doing so, they created clear expectations for what the online and the face-to-face students were to do and helped distinguish the work expected of students in each format. Faculty recognized the importance of when things were scheduled, since they could not count on the online students to be "in class" at the same times as the face-to-face students. They provided opportunities for online students to work with the face-to-face students and present their presentations in person. In short, they had to consider how to make the class work for both groups of students, and the organization of the course became even more important than in a typical face-to-face class (Strawser et al., 2015).

The experiences of the faculty in this case study have implications for other faculty who are moving into the online arena. Faculty members were aware that they needed to work on building community within their classes, since community building and rapport has been tied to student engagement, satisfaction, and retention (Andrade, 2015; Budhai & Williams, 2016; Dixson et al., 2016; Frisby & Martin, 2010; Glazier, 2016; Phirangee, 2016). Faculty also recognized the importance of creating transformational learning opportunities in which students apply, practice, and reflect on their learning (Kolb, 2015; Kolb & Kolb, 2017). For faculty who may be interested in this kind of transformational learning in their online and flexible hybrid classes, this study provides an example of how this might be done within those environments.

This study also has implications for programs who choose to move their major online, since the kind of challenges this department had could be similar to what other departments experience. If a drop in face-to-face enrollments accompanies the addition of online courses, such that face-to-face classes cannot be offered on their own, then departments might consider using some of the more flexible hybrid course structures. In order to do so, there would need to be faculty buy in, as well as opportunities for faculty to experiment with a variety of ways to organize their courses with both face-to-face and online students.

We had a continuum in how these classes were taught, depending on faculty preference, from the completely online courses to the mash-up version of the course, where the faculty taught a section fully face-to-face and incorporated their online students into that section by allowing the online students to have a HiFlex option (Educause, 2010) of attending the in-person class when possible. Other faculty, however, preferred the flexible hybrid approach in which online students could attend their class once a week in-person, if they were available.

Another decision faculty will need to make is how to use their university's learning management platform to accommodate both sets of students, if they choose to go towards the flexible hybrid or mash-up approaches. Most of the faculty interviewed who taught in one of these modes combined their online and face-to-face students into one shell. However, one faculty member initially chose to combine her hybrid and online

sections in terms of her workload, but she decided to create separate learning management system shells for both groups, since she found it easier to keep track of the students that way, which means she did not require any interaction between the two groups of students. The only reason this did not count as two separate classes for her was because the hybrid section did not have enough students in it to be offered by itself.

In the brainstorming group discussions, all of the faculty talked about the workload involved in teaching this way, and administrators were concerned about this as well. However, the administrators seemed to be okay with the setup as long as the faculty were not feeling they were being misused. These types of workload concerns will need to be addressed if departments choose to move in this direction. If both face-to-face and online enrollments grow, departments may be able to separate out the online and face-to-face classes again in order to address workload concerns and offer enough sections to meet the needs of their students, as this department has done for their basic communication course, which has multiple sections of online only and face-to-face classes offered during a semester.

Limitations & Future Research

This case study focused on a metropolitan university in the South. The average age of students taking classes are 25–35, which is not the typical age range of students within a four-year university. Students at the institution are typically considered nontraditional (older students, working students, or transfer students). These students might be drawn to online classes for their availability, and their needs and wants might differ from student populations that are right out of high school. In addition, because the communication field is built upon principles of interactive and transformational learning (Dixson et al., 2016; Morreale et al., 2016; Strawser et al., 2015), communication faculty may have unique teaching experiences leading up to teaching online that faculty from other disciplines may not have.

Future research in this area should focus on how faculty within larger traditional universities, and in other disciplines, face the challenges of online teaching and moving their program to being offered online and creating sustainable pedagogical structures that work for their unique environments. Due to the varying demographics of each of these groups, the findings can provide insight into how departments can meet the needs of different student groups when embracing online education and how faculty manage their pedagogical processes and responsibilities when moving to teaching online.

In conclusion, faculty members in the department being studied who were confronted with the new normal of online education embraced the opportunity to learn and to be transformed. Most of the faculty experimented with offering a type of blended classroom that had not been tried by other institutions by offering face-to-face and online students the opportunity to learn and interact with each other within one course shell. And in doing so, a sustainable way of offering an online curriculum in a department was born.

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